

Listen to your children Rocinha!



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Improving Early Childhood Education in Fragile Contexts
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Childhood is the point of departure for all the works of the poet Manoel de Barros. His words connect the adult with the child that used to exist and with all those around him. His poetry is inspired by a curiosity of someone who sees the world for the first time like children do. This is also the task of researchers at CIESPI/PUC-Rio in a new stage of the project Participatory and Inclusive early childhood¹.

In this stage, questions about inclusion, participation and safety were the agenda for creating strategic methods for talking with thirty children between the ages of three and seven² who are residents of Rocinha.

Planning

The inclusion of young children in the consultations done in Rocinha throughout the project was intended to show that they too have things to say even though they might not have the words. In order to think about the different languages children use to express themselves, the researchers, Cristina Lacerda Porto and Nathercia Lacerda, inspired by Castro (2022)⁴, developed a methodology for listening based on illustrations in children's literature. The images, related to the key concepts of the projects were printed at page size and then plasticized to protect against intense use. Other objects used were a decorated box for illustrations and a round, patterned cloth to show the physical limits of the conversation.

To undertake these actions, the team counted on two research assistants: Nicolas da Silva Cabral, a young man who participated in a training exercise designed by the team, and Everaldo Toledo, a master's degree student in Social Services at PUC-Rio interested in deepening his knowledge at this stage in his career.

Based on the recommendations of community residents (Marta Diniz, Antônio Carlos Firmino and Leandro Castro), we contacted three early childhood centers and one municipal school, who renewed ties to CIESPI/PUC-Rio that went back to 2002.

The first session was with the school *Saci*

At the beginning was the word
It was only later that I saw the delirium of the word.
The delirium of the words was at the beginning, where the
child says: I listen to the color of the birds.
The child does not know that the verb to hear does not
function for colors but for sound.
So, if the child changes the function of the word, he is deli-
rious and so.
In poetry if a child changes the function of a word, it is the
voice of bringing birth-
The word has to catch the delirium.
(BARROS, 1994, p. 17)³.

Sabe Tudo with five boys and four girls aged four to five. The second was with the municipal school *Luis Paulo Horta* with three girls and three boys between six and seven followed by the social center *E ai como e que fica?* with three girls and three boys who were five years old and lastly the Space for Childhood Education *EDI Edir Caseiro Ribeiro*, with two girls and seven boys between three and four. In each place the research team were received eagerly which helped facilitate the interaction with the children.

Caring and playfulness

In the meetings between May and June, 2022, Nathercia and Cristina started conversation wheels using questions specially constructed for the children on the themes of the study while Everaldo and Nicholas were in charge of the

written and photographic record. At the end of each session, the staff met to read the notes and look at the photographs in order to plan the next sessions. In two of the four sessions the staff had the help of the children's teachers who observed attentively and also took photographs. Throughout the process, these records were reexamined several times. In addition to what was recorded in the images, we recaptured the story of each moment considering the various points of view in play.

Photography as well as being a methodological tool, functions as a memory support in the act of studying helping to reveal marks of identity and difference in the subjects (LOPES; GUSMÃO; PORTO, 2013)⁵. The camera shows details, gestures, looks and movements which once recorded enlarge the possibilities of reviewing and interpreting what happened.

Marking out a spot for listening given by the patterned cloth which sometimes was laid out on the floor and other times laid out on the tables in the classroom, created a conversation wheel. The names of everyone there were presented clearly with a tongue twister generating many laughs arousing curiosity about what was about to happen. With an air of suspense, Nathercia took of the lid off the "Mystery Box" and encouraged the children to say what they were seeing as the questions related to the study emerged.

An evaluation of the first meeting led to including another strategy for listening to children: the use of paper and colored pens so that the children could express through drawings what most moved them.

To watch and to hear

The methodology created on the basis of the illustrations, playfulness and drawings revealed poetry and power. The inclusion of children younger than four illuminated what the older children were saying. The children traveled through the main topics not just with words but also with reactions expressed in movement, laughter and drawings.

The children who were between six and seven years old organized themselves better raising their hands to speak and addressing the

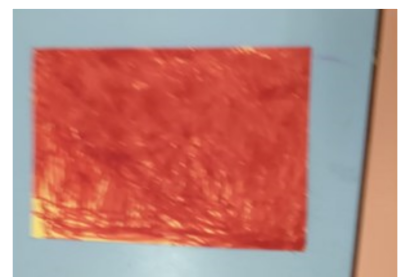


Photo taken by Sheila de Almeida Bezerra, June 30, 2022.

researchers with more attention. The younger children were more restless at the beginning, speaking at the same time and changing places to get closer to Nathercia to see the illustrations closer. Despite these reactions involvement with the topic was very evident. In general, all the children moved towards the scenes presented.

Through the drawings and the words certain fears (insecurities) were repeated: cockroach, rat, rain and the dark. Others were rarer such as: fear of assassination, apparition, vomit and werewolf. The older children said that when they encountered these, in order to deal with them they called an older person, perhaps to kill a cockroach to put on a light or to leave a door open. The smallest ones said first that they were very brave but then talked about the power of super-heroes as a way of confronting their fears.

There is no way to measure how much the illustrations, questions and interactions moved the children and the drawings demonstrated the importance of that means of expression. Noticing that one child was covering his paper with red, Nicolas asked what that was. The child replied, "the blood of a child".



As Madalena Freire (2008, p. 45)⁶ stresses the importance of being open to see him and to hear him, in what he says, starting from his

hypotheses and thoughts. In this way he, the child, seeks sympathy with the rhythm of the other, the group, adapting in harmony to our own.

But children are not always noticed and listened to. When asked whether their ideas and suggestions were listened to in school or at home, the six- to seven-year-old children said that they raised their hands but because they were not always seen, they cried out for attention. Other children said that they jumped up and down on the floor or screamed to the point of exploding.

During these activities, the children felt welcome to reveal their insecurities and wishes. A majority said that they felt safe at home with the family and some mentioned the church. The games the children most mentioned were running, jumping, tight rope, hide and seek, throwing ball, and musical chairs. Other games and figures included toy guns, Lego, Roblox, GTA, AmongUS, Spiderman and the Flash. School was considered the place to play, run, eat, and study. The children mentioned that they liked to play with plasticine and draw. The majority said they did not like to be without recreation or food.

What the children most liked to do was to be and play in the streets but this was often not possible: “my parents don’t have time”, “my mother is anxious”, or “there are bandits”, and “they cannot be left alone”. Their friends are children from school, their brothers and sisters or the cat. The places they say they know are the Zoo, the beach, the little park and a restaurant.

It was not easy for the children to think about the concept exclusion and to reason about other people. For them, almost all the children had friends. They could not remember being excluded or who was excluded. To resolve various disputes at playtime, they would suggest a choice of a game with rules that included everyone.

In research staff meetings specific situations mentioned by the children or reactions which occurred during the activities generated many reflections. Staff needed to show confidence for these ideas to emerge. The time for these interactions were short and it would be ideal if the issues raised continued to be examined by the institutions, not just with the children but also with the teachers and the families.

When analyzing research results from such

a large community as Rocinha one cannot ignore aspects of daily life which requires previous knowledge of the community and/or the presence of a local resident among the staff.

The fear of assassination was the first real fear cited before the fear of a form and a werewolf. At what point does this fear have to do with the urban violence that that surrounds the children we talked with?

Notice the fear of vomit among such fears as rats and cockroaches. Given that this familiarity with rats and cockroaches is a daily reality related to the fragility of basic sanitation in Rocinha would these same fears arise in another context?

And the fear of heavy rain? The children pick up on everything that happens around them. In certain periods of the year, the rains make some residents homeless, cause mud slides and deaths. Depending on the level of rainfall, the municipality sets off sirens which alert residents to the danger and suggest that they gather at certain pre-determined spots. But CIESPI staff who live in Rocinha say that this strategy is flawed because it is almost impossible to find the gathering places. There are not enough people or resources to make the system work as planned. The sirens just created more tension because the residents imagine what is happening without the power to do anything, not to protect themselves or to help the neighborhood.

School drew attention as a place to eat at a time when food insecurity was growing in Brazil.

And how about the blood of a child drawn on paper. The children are exposed to violence which happens in various corners of Brazil. What had this boy witnessed which moves him so much?

It was evident that even doodles, random doodles in all directions with diverse forms and without control, are forms of expression. A drawing can be like something written. Paper, the floor in other places, are where the children register what they perceive about the world and people. Drawing is one way in which children communicate their thoughts and emotion.

Final thoughts

Beyond the objectives of the project which was to listen to the children on certain topics, the

atmosphere which occurred in our meetings with the children, teachers, researchers and readers allowed the eyes of everyone involved to expand.

On the last day in the school Edir Caseiro Ribeiro, Everaldo noted the curiosity generated by the use of a cell phone to take photos automatically using a delay switch which took several seconds to capture the image. The children enjoyed themselves exploring the possibility of counting to ten to photograph themselves.

When we viewed the photos after one attracted special attention. Nicolas appeared at the bottom with a rascally smile revealing his complicity. And so a photograph transformed itself into a photo synthesis of the project.



Our reflections on the written accounts, the photographs and the drawings allowed the experiences to be remembered and analyzed. They

became transformed into an act of knowledge about early childhood and made visible what the children thought about various issues.



The cat and the bird

Finally, as the Brazilian poet Manoel de Barros said, a child is able to listen to the color of birds. And we adults must reconnect with such listening to the world to understand what the child is telling us.

If you are interested in accompanying our project, make suggestions, or learn more about the project Inclusive and Participatory Early Childhood, please contact us by e-mail at ciespi@ciespi.org.br or by WhatsApp at: 21 98266 7045.

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² Only three children had recently reached the age of 7.

³ BARROS, Manoel. O livro das ignoranças. Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira, 1994.

⁴ CASTRO, Liana. Delicadezas, afetos, infâncias: avós, netos e suas histórias. Doctoral thesis. Rio de Janeiro, Departamento de Educação da PUC-Rio de Janeiro, 2022.

⁵ LOPES, Ana Elisabete; GUSMÃO, Denise S.; PORTO, Cristina L. Correspondências entrelaçadas: percursos de pesquisa com fotografia. In: KRAMER, Sonia; NUNES, Maria Fernanda e CARVALHO, Maria Cristina. (Orgs.) Educação Infantil: formação e responsabilidade. Campinas, SP: Papirus, 2013.

⁶ FREIRE, Madalena. Educador educa a dor. São Paulo: Paz e Terra, 2008.